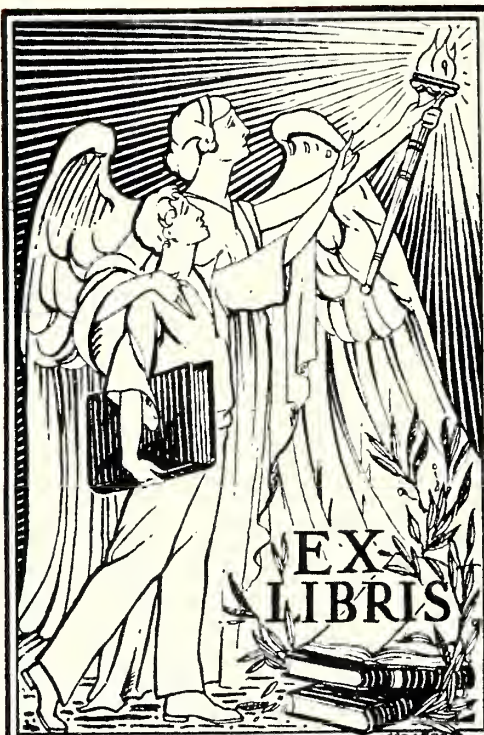


A DAY IN THE TEXAS SCHOOL
FOR THE BLIND

Cora Martin

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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND

A Day in the Texas School for the Blind

By CORA M. MARTIN

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THE noteworthy voluminous report of the Texas Child Welfare Survey, *Texas' Children*, reveals a deplorable lack of provision made by the state for the education of its handicapped children. The failure to accept legal obligation to give the benefits of an education to these unfortunate children is a challenge to the democracy of Texas' public school system. One is led to ask: Does the child, who is blind, deaf, or otherwise handicapped lose his rights as a citizen of the state because of his affliction? If equality of educational opportunity is a principle underlying free, public schools, is it not applicable to the handicapped as well as to the children who are fortunate enough to be classified as normal? Taking the blind as an example, let us consider what responsibilities are being assumed by the state.

At present Texas is educating only about 400 of her estimated 780 blind children, the training being given in two residential schools, one for whites and one for negroes. The school for the whites includes eleven grades, with age limits six and twenty-one. Of the 245 children enrolled, forty-three are Mexicans. About half of the present enrollment are partially-seeing children. Educationally, the school is an independent district and partakes of state school funds, which means that it is a free public school. Transportation and maintenance are provided for those who are unable to meet such expenses, and there is a charge of \$20 per month for board for those who can pay. At present there is not one paying pupil, a fact which indicates the economic status of the patronage.

What is being done for this limited number of blind Texas girls and boys? Are they being given an education comparable to that provided for the seeing children of the state? Our interest led us to take a look at the Texas School for the Blind.

As we enter the main building, the superintendent, who is blind, greets us most cordially and explains the five major lines of work—academic, voca-

tional, athletic, music, and home life. Then he personally conducts us through the school, convincing us over and over that "seeing" is not entirely dependent upon the sense of sight.

We go first to the room for beginners, where we find some fifteen children ranging in age from six to nine. The little girls are dressed in a variety of gay prints and the boys in clothes much like those of boys in any public school, though above the average in cleanliness and neatness, for these children have daily baths. They are all sitting in chairs around low tables, busily engaged with the arrangement of numbers in the grooves of their "slates." Some who finish before others get their styli and cardboard "slates" on which they copy the numbers in Braille. The agility of the little fingers is amazing. We are told that numbers are very important in the early education of the blind, since position and location are determined by counting. Much emphasis is also placed on left and right, since the ability to get directions depends upon those concepts. Little white aprons are put on the children who have partial vision for the purpose of covering the work, thus forcing the fingers to do all the "seeing."

When the number work meets with the teacher's approval the children are free to play as they choose. They go to the end of the room where the toys are kept—tricycles, large floor blocks, dolls, tin dishes, wagons, sand table, and other toys and games. The tricycles prove to be the most popular choice, and the traffic disasters seem to be somewhat fewer than we had observed in groups of seeing children on tricycles. Only the children who have entered recently are noticeably hesitant in their movements and feel their way about with tiny outstretched hands.

We follow one child who has to get something from her locker upstairs. She goes up the stairs with all the assurance that sight could give, and she finds her locker without the slightest difficulty. The housemother for the primary living unit meets us upstairs and takes us

through the sleeping rooms, where spotless little white beds have been neatly made by the children. Individual towels are on a rack at the head of each bed where they can be easily located. Individual lockers contain clothing, toys, and other personal belongings. We are told that the children are taught to dress and undress themselves; to give themselves toilet care; to go about the house unaided; to eat with a spoon and fork, and eventually to use a knife; and to help serve at the table.

We stop in the music room where the second grade is learning Easter hymns to sing with the entire student body at the Easter service. The superintendent explains that the Sunday services, Sunday school in the morning and church service in the afternoon, are outlets for the music work. We confess that we have seen few boys of this age—eight to fourteen—take hymn singing quite so seriously.

As we pass the auditorium on our way to see the vocational work, a girl is practicing on the pipe organ. We are told that general assemblies are held here on Mondays and Fridays, and on other days there are sound-picture shows, musical programs, and programs prepared by special groups of children.

The boys' shop is primarily a broom factory where the brooms for all of the state institutions are made. This work begins with the seventh grade, and as the boys become proficient they are paid for their work. Another type of work here is that of making mattresses, the inner-spring variety as well as the tufted cotton ones. All of the mattresses used in the school are made in the shop. The girls' vocational work also begins in the seventh grade. It consists of sewing, weaving, crocheting, and simple basketry.

Next we enter a sixth grade room where a geography lesson is in progress—a review of a study of Asia. The teacher puts a number of place questions to the class, and the skill with which countries, seas, bays, mountains, plains, and rivers are located on the sectional maps would put to shame many seeing

sixth graders. Discussion is encouraged and there is some degree of informality in the class. One boy asks, "How long has England had control of India, anyway?" And when the discussion leads to the present wars in Asia and Europe, the same boy volunteers, "I heard somebody say over the radio that the United States never had recognized Germany's ownership of Poland."

On our visit to a ninth grade typing class (which is the third year in this work) we encounter the one situation where the blind have the advantage over the seeing learners, for sight is a handicap in learning to type. The dictaphone system is being used, avoiding the difficulty and hindrance to speed of reading the copy from Braille. The accuracy of the letters, exercises, and compositions on the bulletin board and the speed of the typists lead to the conclusion that considerable progress has been made in two and a half years.

We are invited to lunch in the living unit for boys aged ten to fourteen. The house mother, in a spotless white uniform, appears to be peculiarly fitted for her work. She is kindly, motherly, courteous, and she meets us just as a mother in a home would meet guests. The dining room is light and airy, with four tables, each of which seats eight boys and a teacher. We are impressed by the orderliness, the homelike atmosphere, the wholesome food which is planned by a trained dietitian, the table manners, the efficiency of the boys in waiting on the tables, and the fine spirit in which they accept their turn in helping with the dishes. We are also impressed when we visit the bedrooms, each of which accommodates three boys, by the neatly made beds and orderly individual cabinets. As we rest after lunch, we catch bits of the spirited conversations, boyish giggling, contented humming, and happy singing emanating from these rooms.

The gong sounds, and teachers and children from all the "cottages" go back to the schoolrooms. We go along with the third grade teacher to hear her class read. They are in the midst of a unit entitled "Children of the Congo." The lesson begins with some individual assignments from books which the teacher has assembled from the library, all in Braille, of course. Then the geographies are passed and the topic "The Congo" is found in the table of contents. The selection has been read at a previous period, and now the children

are told that they may write questions based on the selection for members of the class to answer. There is a busy prick-prick of styli for a few minutes, then time is called and the questioning begins. Donald asks, "What did the black people do when white people first came to explore their land?" He calls on Rosa, who answers, "They hid in the bushes." Whereupon Donald asks for proof, and Rosa reads the paragraph upon which she bases her answer. Now Rosa puts her question and has the answer verified by the text, and so the game continues until all of the sixteen girls and boys have participated, some showing considerable ingenuity and insight. One girl introduces the multiple choice type of question—"The cannibals eat one of these three things: snakes, people, canals. Which is it?" Seldom have we heard better oral reading from third graders, and seldom have we observed a more informal, happy classroom atmosphere.

Wishing to see some senior class work, we go to the eleventh grade where a lesson is being conducted in salesmanship. The subject under discussion is that of high-pressure methods, such as flattery, building up the "yes" frame of mind, and how to resist these. A good deal of lively general discussion goes on, but we have to leave before any conclusions are reached.

The superintendent is proud of his music department and takes us through the several instrumental rooms where students are practicing on pianos, violins, flutes, and various wind instruments. Two teachers, one of whom is blind, are giving piano lessons. We are told that music is offered to all the children, from second grade through high school, and that only a limited number fail to take advantage of this means of enjoyment. Although the combined sound effect is not particularly pleasing, there is no doubt about the pleasure of the performers.

We hurry along to see the athletic grounds. There is a seventy-five yard race track with a small cable stretched waist high down the center. The runners touch this cable very lightly as they run, in order to guide their course. Besides the race track there are rope-climbs, broad-jumps, and "mules." All of the older boys participate in these sports, and the winners in the school races enter the national contest. The Texas School for the Blind has won the national trophy for the last two years

and if they win again this year it will be theirs for keeps. Will they win? Ask these boys!

We learn that the two large cement squares on the grounds between the boys' athletic section and the younger children's playgrounds are skating rinks where the children of all age levels have great fun and learn freedom of bodily movement in the bargain. On the playgrounds we see jungle-gyms, slides, covered sand piles, swings, and seesaws.

Here come the primary girls to the gymnasium, and we go in with them. They act much like any group of little girls anticipating a game period, although there is less running and jumping, and I hear one child who has not been here long say, "Somebody lead me!" Somebody does. There is some shouting, a few "Hello's" to the superintendent, and when the gong sounds I hear, "Oh, gee-whillikens! We're going to be late!"

Three little girls, who look rather pale and thin, climb the bars while the others are directed to Mother Goose plays, ring games, and folk dances. One little girl puts on a gym suit and stages an acrobatic show for us, while another, who has not the power of coordination necessary for the group work, sits on the floor and listens.

As we return to the superintendent's office, the hospital is pointed out. In this hospital there are two nurses always on duty. It has a half-time dentist, an oculist, and a physician. In the school there are thirty-two teachers, all of whom can read Braille and have had some professional training for the positions they hold.

We are shown the new public address system and the master radio which controls radios in all of the living units and in several classrooms. We walk through the library where there are some thousand volumes in Braille and a very creditable professional library for teachers. Of special interest are the forty-eight "talking books," a few for the young children, but most of them are for the older students. The great value of the radio and "talking books" to the blind is apparent.

An attempt to summarize these observations leads to the conclusion that the quality of education which Texas is offering those of its blind who are fortunate enough to be located and enrolled in the state school, is comparable to that in the typical schools for its seeing children. If the grouping of blind

and partially seeing children for teaching purposes and the residential system are features which do not meet with the approval of the authorities on the education of the blind, neither do many features of schools for the seeing children measure up to the advocates of the modern school. Although we are not un-

aware of the inadequacy of the provision which Texas has made for "fitting the blind into the community on an equal plane with his seeing friends," we are convinced that it is quantity rather than quality which shows the most room for improvement. For since there is no provision for locating the

handicapped child, obviously, comparatively few of them are deriving benefit from the education which the state offers. Only when all the blind and other handicapped children are reached can we say that we have a situation in which equality of educational opportunity may become a reality.

Students' Permanent Record Is Kept on Film

PROFESSOR H. H. LEWIS, associate professor of physics and mathematics at Abilene Christian College in Abilene, has introduced a unique idea into educational work by using 35 mm. micro-film to make permanent records of his students' work during the past semester. To the best of his knowledge this is the first time it has been used this way in the teaching field.

Micro-film is the latest method of preserving records of such things as manuscripts, blueprints, newspapers, etc. In its simplest form, it is nothing more than a picture of the printed material or piece of art taken on fine-grain film and developed with fine-grain developer, thus micro-film gains its name from what it pictures, and not from the type of film used.

Once the negative is made, photographic copies can be made as frequently and as large as is desired. A new machine has recently been put on the market which will make micro-records of checks and notes for the banks at the rate of 100 per minute.

Under Abilene Christian College's system, the teachers keep each student's record of tests, absences, tardies, projects, etc. on class cards three by five inches in size. Using a small candid camera, Prof. Lewis photographed these cards in groups of four on a 36 exposure roll, thus filing 144 students' records on one strip of film.

Though very tiny and unreadable on the film, photographic copies of any student's record for a semester can be printed in a few seconds. Some of the advantages which Prof. Lewis listed for this method are: it facilitates compact filing; it prevents any alteration of records; it is a more durable substance than paper; and unpermitted observa-

tion of the records is practically impossible.

Because of the publicity this idea has received locally, Prof. Lewis has been invited to exhibit and explain this new use for micro-film at the sectional meeting of the Texas Academy of Science to be held April 19 and 20 at San Angelo.

In the picture Prof. H. H. Lewis of Abilene Christian College pauses on the campus and unrolls a strip of micro-film to show one of his physics students,

Hayes Mullins, the tiny picture of his last semester-record. Mullins, sophomore from San Saba, frowns as he tries to locate his "class card" on the film.

Directly below the instructor and student is a "strip-print" from the roll of micro-film, showing the size of the three by five inch cards on the film, and their arrangement in groups of four. The small black dots and lines seen on the cards are figures and writing which can not be read unless enlarged.



Customary School Discipline and the Making of Democratic Minded Citizens

By E. M. CAIN

Dallas

THE making of democratic minded citizens is a duty imposed upon the whole of society, and not the school only. Nor is customary school discipline the chief factor in the school program. The problem presented here must be considered in its relation to and not apart from other elements in the synthesis—for the democratic mind is an artificial creation, not a natural development. If there is any lack of democratic mindedness in our citizenship, I would not place the onus of failure altogether on the public school, nor the practices which pass for discipline. But, long observation and some experience convince me that even harsh criticism is not always unjustified.

It is easy to criticize. To be helpful is the test. Charges are soon brought, but sustaining them in the open forum of enlightened opinion is more tedious. That there are those with something other than the true American spirit and the democratic mind abroad in the land few will deny—and one need not speak of them as “New Dealers,” “Economic Royalists,” or propagators of isms in an effort to identify them—they are everywhere. Still, to blame any one of our great social institutions and demand its demolition is doubtful justice. No one could truthfully hold the churches responsible for all our sinful habits, nor the home for innumerable divorces. Why then assume that the public school is at fault when education fails to produce millions after the images of Plato, Cornelia, Thomas Moore, Jefferson, and Kate Smith, all of whom will line up and sing spontaneously, with lusty but futile sentimentality, that current favorite of this slipping generation, “God Bless America?”

Experts in child psychology and “progressive” education have pointed the way to complete restoration of the vir-

tues prevalent among our “Founding Fathers” and pioneer mothers. Their conclusions seem not to compass the difficulty, nor are their suggestions always practical; that is, their basic lines of reasoning diverge so fundamentally from what goes on around me that I wonder if many of these intellectuals do not function in a vacuum and, by dint of writing to and for one another, have come to imagine they are the voice of wisdom to the people on the ground. But whether we animate or regiment, the combination of flesh and blood and stimuli has not produced that harmony of wants and wills which promise surely to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution in which we have confidently rested democracy’s hopes.

But more to the point! Let us examine into what we mean and what we want, in order that we may know whether we in the schools are manufacturing legal tender citizenship or debasing the coinage through defects in discipline. By school discipline is meant that control over activities or pupils resulting in orderly behaviour and effective schoolwork. Not an occasional coercion of an offender against the proprieties of environment, but a continuous influence upon youth at daily duties such as determines performance and fixes attitudes toward social surroundings. By customary school discipline is meant such control enforced in the vicinity of the school, in many communities of any state, during the process of education.

Democracy is not just a form of government, but is the genius of a people for self-governance. It is a system of living in which the activities of the people are self-regulated in the interest of protection, promotion of the general welfare, and maintenance of their common rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Says Dr. Charles A. Beard in his “Unique Function of Education”: “Owing to the nature of popular usage there is danger that the term democratic society will be taken too narrowly, in a mere political sense. Society is more than politics. It embraces all culture and implies the wid-

est possible diffusion of all the means essential to the good life.” Citizenship is not merely membership in a social order, but active participation in the business of living and the discharge of responsibilities incident to life in a civilized community in modern America. But, there are those who contend that the pattern by which we live today is not democratic. Admit this contention and we have no chart to guide us. Deny it, and try to establish criteria to measure our achievement! One might as easily prove that in the home is anarchy, in the world of work chaos, and that in politics it is a choice between Marx and Machiavelli.

Who are democratic minded citizens? Such would be individuals whose training has brought their bodies in subjection to their minds and who are sufficiently intelligent to cheerfully perform their share of the work of the world. They are described as adults whose instincts have been so controlled as to inculcate a social attitude, causing them to submit their impulses to moral guidance that the general welfare, rather than personal advantage, shall determine action. Accepting this definition as the ideal, and applying it to the reactions of our acquaintances, can we claim that customary school discipline has become the miracle by which we redeem the race from the urges of passions to a life of philosophical calm and unselfish service? I think not, and yet I hope for better results.

There is actually no such thing as customary discipline. Discipline varies much in its effects, according to kind, occasion, method, pupil, and disciplinarian. Two otherwise identical instances differ because of the individuals involved. So-called rigid, impartial, discipline is vicious. And yet, such is the cold conception in many schools. The same penalty for seemingly the same offense is seldom impartial treatment. Invariably it strikes one harder than the other. Adaptive discipline is more fair, but more difficult to administer and hence less practiced. The disciplinarian is oftentimes too lazy or indifferent to explore the situation for signs pointing

Speech delivered before the Southwest Section of the National Municipal League, Adolphus Hotel, Dallas, March 22.

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